Improving patient experience in urgent care settings

Sharp Rees-Stealy (San Diego, California) uses TouchWorks EHR and the Patient Tracking Board to improve the patient’s experience across its five urgent care settings. Through a quality-improvement initiative, the organization focused on three areas: intake, radiology and discharge. By streamlining these processes, Sharp Rees-Stealy has become more efficient and significantly increased patient satisfaction scores.

Experience

With 22 locations, Sharp Rees-Stealy is one of the largest, most comprehensive medical groups in San Diego County. Most locations offer primary and specialty care, laboratory, physical therapy, radiology, pharmacy and urgent care services all in one place.

Sharp Rees-Stealy has used TouchWorks EHR as its electronic health record (EHR) since 2006. The solution helped the organization save annual costs, including $500,000 on billing and data entry, $1.2 million on medical records costs and $1 million on transcription costs.

For its five urgent care locations, Sharp Rees-Stealy used another vendor’s patient tracking board to help monitor the progress of patient visits. “The first tracking boards we used weren’t integrated into our TouchWorks EHR,” Urgent Care Supervisor Roxanne Norton, BSN, CEN said. “Because of that, there were a lot of limitations as to what it could do for us.”

Solution

When Sharp Rees-Stealy realized the potential benefits from an integrated solution, they turned to Allscripts. The organizations began working together on developing the Patient Tracking Board, and implemented it in 2013.

The solution provides greater visibility as patients move through urgent care departments. “Day to day, the Patient Tracking Board helps staff manage patient flow,” Norton said. “We can use milestones to see where patients are in their stay, the time that they’ve been in the department, notifications when orders are up – and it’s all minute by minute.”

MAKING THE INTAKE PROCESS MORE EFFICIENT

In an urgent care setting, wait times can significantly affect patient experience. Sharp Rees-Stealy developed a quality improvement process, based on Lean Six Sigma principles, to help reduce wait times. The organization made several changes, including restructuring staffing to promote teamwork and reduce duplicative work.

The quality improvement team developed duration-driven process targets. For example, urgent care staff were responsible for the patient being ready within 10 minutes, seen within 20 minutes and discharged within 60 minutes of arrival, when medically possible. The Patient Tracking Board enables staff to set milestones and update status to help track these measures throughout the duration of each patient visit.
Sharp Rees-Stealy Medical Group

STREAMLINING RADIOLOGY WORKFLOWS

Urgent care staff collaborated with radiology team members to improve the patient’s radiology experience. In addition to opening a new room and adding radiology staff, Sharp Rees-Stealy used the Patient Tracking Board to eliminate several manual steps, including a phone call to radiology with each new order, printing and hand-delivering paper requisitions and more. Now, staff can update statuses on the Patient Tracking Board to indicate radiology orders and progress.

“We added new milestones to the Patient Tracking Board this past year and developed a radiology-only view,” Norton said. “It helped us improve communication with the Radiology Department to further streamline the process.”

STANDARDIZING THE DISCHARGE PROCESS

Sharp Rees-Stealy is currently in a trial phase with a new discharge process. Previously, the process was not standardized and caused confusion. Clinicians were working with orders to discharge the patient, but there was no standard process for discharge, facilitating follow-up care or providing home-care instructions.

Through the Patient Tracking Board, the team can now set discharge milestones with specific associated processes, which eliminates using an order. “Using TouchWorks EHR, we found that there were already templates that could help with our discharge process,” Norton said. “Between that and the Patient Tracking Board, they’ve made life a lot easier.”

Outcomes

Cheri Pope, manager of operations in Urgent Care, noticed an improvement on the administration side. “The Patient Tracking Board reports provide a lot of useful information, from stay times, to transport and more that we report regularly to our CEO,” she said. “It has decreased the amount of time it takes to collect data from many days to maybe one or two days. That has been really beneficial.”

Sharp Rees-Stealy also met its original quality improvement targets for urgent care, by reducing wait times and improving patient satisfaction. “Patients notice a difference, because it takes less time to get them into an exam room and seen by a physician,” Pope said.

“The Patient Tracking Board milestones have been instrumental for duration-driven targets,” Norton said. “Patient satisfaction scores in our five urgent care centers this past year continue to exceed the goals of 90% in ‘Time to provider,’ ‘Time to treatment,’ and ‘Overall’ satisfaction categories.”

The team at Sharp Rees-Stealy will continue work on improving the discharge process, integrating the Patient Tracking Board with orders that originate outside of TouchWorks EHR. It is also developing an all-site view to help on-call physicians see where the needs are greatest. Using its quality improvement process, the team continues to revise and improve the Patient Tracking Board to fit the needs of the Sharp Rees-Stealy clinicians.

URGENT CARE QUALITY INITIATIVE OUTCOMES:

- Patient Tracking Board helped improve Press Ganey rankings (from 3Q 2013 to 3Q 2014):
  - “Time to provider” patient satisfaction - increased from 5th percentile to 94th percentile
  - “Time to treatment area” patient satisfaction – increased from 16th percentile to 97th percentile
  - Overall patient satisfaction – increased from 51st percentile to 94th percentile
- Reduced time spent collecting data for reports by 50%

“[Physicians] have been happy because they have a better workflow and better view of the department... Overall the Patient Tracking Board has been a very positive experience.”

Roxanne Norton, BSN, CEN
Urgent Care Supervisor